Cooperative Conservation Workshop
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WELCOME

by

Lynn Scarlett

Deputy Secretary, Dept of Interior

Welcome. The great conservationist Aldo Leopold of the last century envisioned a nation of citizen stewards, folks working on their farms, in their neighborhoods, in their communities to lend a caring hand to the landscape. It was a vision of conservation and cooperation, a vision that blended healthy lands, thriving communities and dynamic economies.

As I look into my 21st century crystal ball, I see changes on the landscape that amplify and affirm that vision of cooperative conservation. I see a yearning for partnerships. I see collaboration and cooperation. That yearning is not serendipitous. It's linked to changes on the landscape, what we see as an interconnectivity on that landscape.

Consider that nature itself knows no boundaries. The problems that we face, invasives, cross both public and private lands and cut across many jurisdictions. Waters not only flow across jurisdictions but among many states. We see coastal restoration along hundreds and hundreds of miles.

We have a landscape that is interconnected. So, too, we have interconnected disciplines as we work in conservation. We have biologists, hydrologists, managers, economists, ranchers on the landscape.

A challenge we face is how do we share knowledge among these different disciplines? We need the specialization of that hydrologist, but at the same time, we need

conversations that cut across the hydrologists and the biologists and the rancher so that we can find common solutions working together.

We also operate in a context of constraints - constraints on access to resources, technology and skill sets, and that means the imperative of tapping many different sources for those resources, leveraging and partnering together so that the whole is greater than the sum of the parts.

We also have a context of needing experiential knowledge, the kind of knowledge that comes from time, place and situation, experience and practice on the ground, the knowledge of the rancher out on his landscape who knows that land in summer and in winter, in drought and in flooding, or the fisherman who knows the fishing practices of his boat. We need that experiential knowledge to help define the doable and pinpoint the possible.

Consider the folks I met up in Alaska a few years ago where our Fish & Wildlife Service told me about declining albatross. They had identified certain fishing practices as implicated perhaps in those declines. They went and knocked on the doors of the fishermen and said, "We think we have a problem." The fishermen listening said, "Geez, we didn't know our practices had that effect, but we can do things differently." There, through that conversation and that tapping of their experiential knowledge we were able to find a solution that benefited the birds and allowed the fishing to continue.

We also see in this 21st century context of conservation a yearning for public engagement, folks wanting to have deep conversations and be part of shared governance rather than simply two-minute testimony, and that means finding a context in which we can sit around a table and find common solutions.

In that same context, we also see a growing interface of people and place. Think of the lands in the West where once we had rural outposts and small towns, now burgeoning

with tens of thousands of people, sometimes hundreds of thousand, in proximity to our public lands. And that means the imperative of collaboration, learning to work together between gateway communities and our parks, among our wildlife refuges and the folks that live in their vicinity, among our public lands and private communities around them.

Alongside these trends we see a growing appetite for folks to get beyond conflict, to get beyond adversarial dialogue to conversation with the center, not sides.

Now, nurturing cooperative conservation requires capacity building. It requires we build teamwork, that we build the capacity for negotiation, facilitation. It's not just nice to do, cooperative conservation, indeed it's imperative as we work on these interconnected landscapes with interconnected professions and interconnected problems.

Nurturing cooperative conservation is partly a matter of policy, but it's largely a matter of people and organizational culture. Cooperative conservation highlights the imperative of strategic thinking, of conflict management, of teamwork. It heightens the importance of external awareness, of creativity and resilience, the ability to adjust and adapt as the world changes around us and as new players involve in the conversation of conservation.

These qualities, of course, are not new, but their importance in the modern conservation context is heightening. What does that modern conservation context look like? It must be an interdisciplinary context, a blending of professions. It must be a mediating context, one in which we have folks capable of negotiating, facilitating good conversations. It must be a team-building process. And it must be results focused.

That results focus puts a premium on the ability to define metrics and to monitor.
But I'm reminded of the words of Professor Don Kettle who once wrote that the attractiveness of performance metrics is exceeded only by the challenges of their design and implementation.

You're all gathered here today to hear the experiences of organizations, both large and small, who have worked on landscapes also large and small, groups representing some 700 different partners who have lent a caring hand to the landscape. They'll share their knowledge of what succeeds and what challenges lie before them and in the past, and how they've overcome those challenges.

I'm delighted to turn now to Luther Probst who will guide you through this two days of workshops. I know you'll have great conversations, great opportunities to network. Thank you very much. Go forth and do good works.